

CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

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Professor Joshua Lederberg
Chairman
Department of Genetics
Stanford University Medical Center
Stanford, California

Dear Professor Lederberg:

I hope you will not view this brief note as an affront but I wanted you to see this clipping from last night's paper in view of a point you made a few weeks back about Jewish incorporation into "American" life.

As you may recall I maintained that it was important for members of a group, such as Hopi, Tewa, or Navajo, to retain as much of their culture, including language, as was possible for survival as well as for dignity and high quality life. You felt that the Jewish people had given up their language and culture in the U.S. This is doubtful, and there is every reason to believe that there is a viable, dignified and functional Jewish culture within the U.S. And if there is to be similar quality to black, Indian, Chicano or other subcultures they must retain the traditions and language that provide the basis for identity, membership, reciprocity, security and pride. Given this behavioral base that encourages genetic isolation, then natural selection can work out the long-term problems of genetic incompatibility, such as frequency-dependent Rh maternal-fetal incompatibility selection, excessive heterosis, if it occurs in man, balanced polymorphisms, like abnormal hemoglobin S, and so forth.

The Jews have probably survived more because of the beauty and strength of their traditions, not the least of which is the ultimate rationalization for self-preservation, namely that they are God's chosen people, than because of any differential genetic strength, although that too may someday be demonstrable. Jews in the U.S. may have lost their language, but they have not lost the use of a small number of Hebrew, or if from northern Europe, Yiddish, words that seem to me to serve just as well as a whole language in this instance. In fact, the Jewish population seems to offer the best model and argument for cultural and linguistic preservation. If we have to communicate through bi-lingual translators, so be it, because if it wise, as James Neel as recently argued, to preserve our genetic variability, how much more important is it to preserve our cultural variation, in view of its demonstrably more immediate value to short-term adaptive problems?

My very best wishes to you over the holiday season.

Sincerely yours,

Christy G. Turner II

*To the contrary, the idiom is now very widely diffused & shared, as a borrowed word likechutzpah illustrates. Joshua.

TURNER, Christy
is an environmentalist.
Not in isolation. We share